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A web-based system, method and program product are provided for storing content objects (e.g., a custom compilation or prepublished work) in a data repository as a group of hierarchically related content entities. Each noncontainer content object is preferably stored as a separate entity in the data repository. Each content entity is also stored as a row in a digital library index class as a collection of attributes and references to related content entities and containers. As content objects are input to the system or as a user selects desired objects for inclusion in a content object, the system arranges the content objects hierarchically, e.g., into volumes, chapters and sections according to the order specified by the input content object or by the user. The system then creates a file object (e.g., a CBO) defining the content object that contains a list or outline of the container and noncontainer entities selected, their identifiers, order and structure. This file object is stored separately in the data repository.

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